



Fact Sheet

Mishandling of PCBs: A Case Study



Light fixture with leaking ballast

The Problem:

In June 1999, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) received a complaint about a leaking fluorescent light at the Wilsonville Primary School in Oregon. A sample of the oily substance that dripped from the fixture was tested by a lab. It contained PCBs, which was reported to the principal and the district's maintenance staff.

Shortly after receiving this information, EPA met with school officials. Together they examined other light ballasts in the school and found more leaking ballasts. EPA gave the school officials information on safe handling and disposal of PCB ballasts and proper protection for workers.

The Inspection:

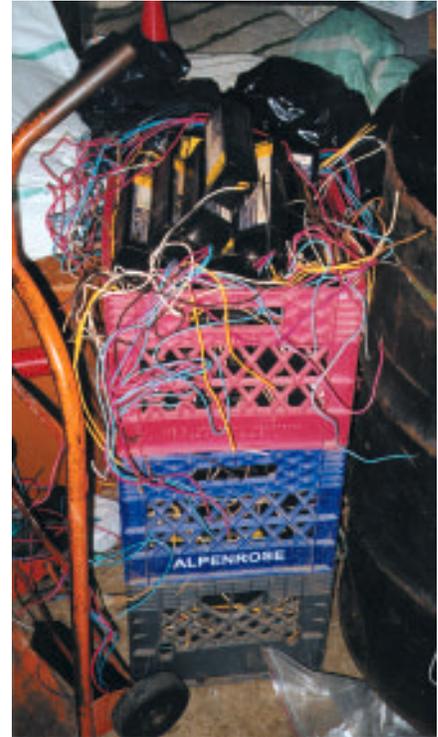
In July, EPA and the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality inspected the Wilsonville Primary School and the West Linn High School. During the inspections, EPA learned there had been a prior incident at the Wilsonville Primary School where a light ballast leaked oil over books, desks and other school equipment. In addition, inspectors discovered the district was in the process of remodeling and upgrading light fixtures district-wide. The old light

fixtures were being taken to the Stafford Primary School and being dismantled there.

EPA inspected Stafford Primary School and discovered that the old fixtures were not being properly handled. Leaking PCB ballasts were being stored on the school playground. Workers handling the leaking PCBs ballasts were not trained in the proper handling of hazardous materials.

The Results:

Now the school district faced another problem. EPA concluded that there were a significant number



Ballasts were removed from light fixtures and stored in open bins

of use, storage, and disposal violations of the federal Toxic Substances Control Act. EPA also had concerns about whether maintenance workers or school staff



Fixtures and leaking ballasts were stored on playground

members had been exposed to high levels of PCBs.

EPA and school district staff met in August to discuss what needed to be done to fix the problems and make sure that PCBs were not being spread around. By the end

of August, the school district had cleaned up the PCBs. However, the school district is still facing financial penalties sought by EPA for alleged violations of the federal PCB regulations.

Because of these incidents, EPA is concerned that problems found at the West Linn-Wilsonville School District may be found at other schools in the region. EPA will be conducting random inspections at schools in Washington, Oregon, Idaho and Alaska in early 2000 to determine whether they have PCB problems as well.

For More Information:

Information on this case can be found on EPA's webpage at <http://www.epa.gov/r10earth/pcb.htm>.

If you have questions or concerns, you can call EPA's PCB staff:

Dan Duncan at

206-553-6693 or toll free at 1-800-424-4372 ext. 6693

or

Ray Nye at

206-553-4226 or toll free at 1-800-424-4372 ext. 4226

or

Bernie Pribish at

206-553-5293 or toll free at 1-800-424-4372 ext. 5293



U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
Region 10
1200 Sixth Avenue (ECO-081)
Seattle, Washington 98101-9797